

MEMBERS' COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS ARTICLES

WHAT IS A PERFIN? Bulletin 251/7; 252/6; 256/8.

The original article by Michael Rucklidge in Bulletin 251 produced quite a number of comments. Some appeared in Bulletin 252 and 256 and the first of the following contributions on this theme is in response to the article by Brian Birch in issue 256.

From David Andersen - Australia.

Brian Birch's comments about what is a perfin in the Feb'92 issue of the Perfin Society Bulletin are interesting but his suggested definition "A perfin is a number of holes in a distinct pattern applied to postage and other stamps as security against theft" still has a couple of problems.

1) The condition that such puncturing be done for the purpose of security against theft is unable to be checked for the majority of private perfin users. I'm sure that some of the individuals concerned, in deciding to buy perforators, did so for advertising purposes, as a gimmick or to keep up with "good business practice". I can't prove this but neither can it be proved that for all of the private commercial patterns, security against theft was the primary motive.

2) Historically the term Perfin encompasses more than those items punctured as security against theft.

Warren Travell in "Perfins" (U.S.) v.2 no.5 December 1946 mentions SPIFS, the British term for perfins meaning "Stamps Perforated for Insurance against Fraud". By contrast he also lists three divisions of "Perfins" in v.2 no.4 of the same title in an article on what should one collect. These divisions were:-

- a) perforated postage, where the punching is done as a security measure.
- b) revenue stamps punched with a companies initials as a method of cancellation.
- c) stamps punched by postal authorities in place of more customary surcharges (I think he meant overprints) e.g. S.O.

The point is that Brian's definition amounts to the same as "SPIF" but "perfin" is historically a wider term.

A wider definition of perfin to include the SPECIMEN, personal patterns etc, that some would not want included, is in fact not based on what I collect but on the type of items perforated - i.e. postage and revenue stamps or stationery, and the method of production - eg. perforating. Certainly there is some material that is less desirable such as personal patterns, but is this not also the case with normal stamp collecting. A definition, if it will serve any useful purpose, should not be based on a condition that is impossible to check - the motivation of the purchaser - but on the method of production and the end result, devoid of motive.

Brian also wonders about the Western Australian circular punches. I am happy to advise that these punches were certainly produced for security purposes and not to identify convict mail. The following notice appeared in the Government Gazette from Western Australia for Tuesday 5 August 1862.

"For the purpose of preventing the improper use of Postage Stamps provided for Imperial Services, in future each stamp will be perforated in or near the centre, the hole being about one-sixth of an inch in diameter, and all persons are requested not to receive any stamps so perforated which may be offered as money".

Sloper's first perfins were not produced on postage stamps until 1868, six years later. Was there a link between Sloper and the Imperial bureaucracy or the case of a similar idea being developed separately? However, the histories of perfins starting with Sloper as the originator of perfins on stamps possibly need a little modification. I imagine the Imperial Service neglected to pay Sloper any royalties also!! (Touché - Ed)

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From Frank Brown.

A list of official perfins applied to fiscal stamps by M. Burrows and C. Tennant appeared in the Perfins Bulletin of Sept'1976.

A correspondent of mine - J. Schonfeld, of Victoria, B.C., Canada - is a joint author of the catalogue "The Impressed Duty Stamps of Great Britain" (by S.B. Frank, J. Schonfeld and W.A. Barber, 360pps, 2nd edition 1981). Broadly, these are the embossed stamps which

appear on documents subjected to Stamp Duty from 1694 to date and very rarely, some of these stamps (especially in late Victorian times) are found perforated.

He has made a study of such perforations and where they also apply to printed fiscal stamps. The initials and other devices perforated into both kinds of stamps have a different purpose from "perforations" - they serve to cancel the stamps per se, or to cancel the document, or to accept the document as properly executed by government departments or subsidiary authorities. His invented term for such devices is "PERFCANS" which fall into five groups:-

Lettering only

Lettering and Crown

Lettering and Crown in a ring

Lettering and date

Date only

A common example is "Crown/RCJ" in a ring which is found on embossed stamps worded "ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE" with date plugs 1886 etc. and on the adhesive JUDICATURE FEE stamps of the 1881 issue.

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